

Influencing Academic Self-Identity of Middle School Students

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What is Academic Self-Identity (ASI)?

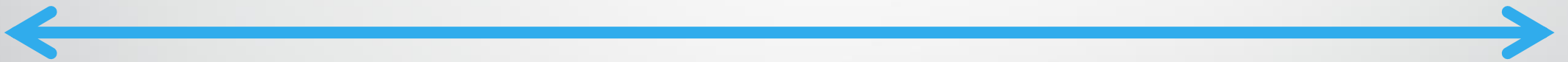
- Not clearly defined within the literature
- Some important concepts to draw from:
 - Self, identity – Holland et al.
 - Academic self-concept – Marsh, Shavelson
 - Career aspirations, future attainment – Crockett
 - Real versus fantasy – Berns et al.
 - Importance of school/role of school

Study Background

- Question: What is the influence of relationships in the development of an academic self-identity among adolescent students?
 - Today, we will address the academic self-identity portion
- Qualitative (phenomenology)
- Longitudinal (2 of 6 years analyzed)
 - Interview each fall and spring from 7th-12th grade
- 44 students from 8 GEAR UP schools
 - 2-7 students from each school
 - 1-2 high achieving, "class leaders"
 - 1-2 struggling academically and/or socially
 - 1-2 "invisible"

Preliminary Findings

School is...



- Personal End

"Job"

Disengaged

School is ...

Means to a Personal End

- 8 students
- School is a vehicle to work toward achieving long-term goals
 - “I applied to ECTA and I circled it on the sheet, so I’m going to ECTA for IT.”
 - Was accepted to two magnets and could choose which he wanted to attend
 - “Try to see which one would be a faster way out so I could get to college quickly.”
 - “But the classes and how everything is, I mean, they added fundamentals—fundamentals of numeracy and literacy. Which, it groups the, you know, smart kids with the, you know, underdeveloped kids. Which is a weird combo. And I’ve never really felt it before, so it’s kind of weird, in fact...It—I, honestly, my own opinion, I don’t like it.”

School is ... a “Job”

- 29 total students
- 3 sub-themes
 - School is ... a place to experience short-term goals
 - School is ... the place where my social life occurs
 - School is ... just a place where I can figure myself out

Short-Term Goals

- 6 students
- Students struggle, set goals to overcome, and celebrate achievements
 - “I have been great. In fact, I’ve done a lot of things this year. I have done track and made myself a goal.”
 - “I think I really did good this year, because I have straight A’s now, and that was really my goal.”
 - “It’s going good. I have—on my progress report that we got, I had all A’s and then one B...I was pretty proud of myself.”
 - “Only a few times I’m like, just in math, I’m just like, ommigod this is a little hard, but then I get it.”
 - “It’s going really good. Um, I’m still enjoying it a lot...But, other than that, it’s king of stressing...Stressing because, you know, like all the things are happening.”

Social Life

- 10 students
- School is a place to build friendships and work with other people (teachers and peers)
 - Favorite part about school is “being with friends and enjoying learning and stuff.”
 - “It’s going to be fun doing football [in high school].”
 - “I hate algebra...mostly because the teacher doesn’t teach us.” Handled this challenge in class, “with my friends—we, like, study with each other and, like, help each other out all the time.”
 - “[In middle school] I had some help from the teachers and...yeah. Friends and stuff.”

Figuring Myself Out

- 13 students
- Tough group to figure out
- Lack of attention or focus on school
- Do not talk about using school to figure out lives
 - Q: How are you preparing for tests? **A: Um, just studying.**
 - Q: So how are you doing in school? Do you like school? **A: School is okay.**
 - Q: Is there anything you really like—what's your favorite class? **A: I don't really have one. It's just all the same.**

Disengaged

- 7 students
- School is not related to personal life or goals
 - “I don’t like this school anymore. I don’t like school period.”
 - School is boring but student continues to attend, “because my parents make me.”
 - In high school, “still then I’ll probably be failing all my classes, as usual. Ha.”

Conclusion & Implications

- Students in first and last categories appear to have solidified their ASI
 - We are concerned that students who are disengaged may drop out
- Those in “Job” category appear to be more in flux
- Initial category (pre-study), was not always correlated to groups, particularly in the “Job” category
- Some engagement, even if it is just extracurricular activities, can help students stay engaged in school

Group Discussion

- Break into groups and discuss the following questions:
 - It is easy to gravitate toward the first group (school as a means to a personal end) and revel in their drive. But, how do you actually challenge them more? Or, how do you ensure that these are not the only students that get your attention?
 - How do you encourage students to build short-term goals into long-term goals?
 - How do you deliberately tie academics to social needs?
 - How do you help students see the relevance of their education?
 - What strategies can you think of to engage the disengaged?

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